

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4317

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 3526

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJ: ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF ADDIS ABABA-DJIBOUTI RAILROAD
ATTACK

1. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF DISRUPTION OF ADDIS ABABA -
DJIBOUTI RAILROAD COULD BE QUITE SERIOUS. AS BRIDGES
WERE BLOWN IN EACH SIDE OF DIRE DAWA, DIRE DAWA/HARAR
ARE IS NOW VULNERABLE TO SEVERE POL SHORTAGES, AS THAT
REGION HAS BEEN EXCLUSIVELY SUPPLIED BY RAILROAD.
ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION FOR THESE PRODUCTS
IS POSSIBLE BUT VERY DIFFICULT (SEE PARA 3).
THIS INCLUDES, OF COURSE, NOT ONLY THE CIVILIAN SECTOR
BUT ALSO MILITARY UNITS STATIONED IN THE AREA.

2. EMBASSY HAS ALSO LEARNED THAT AVIATION GASOLINE IS
IMPORTED THROUGH DJIBOUTI (IT IS NOT PRODUCED AT ASSAB
REFINERY). CONSEQUENTLY, AVGAS USED BY EAL FOR DC-3
SERVICE AND BY MILITARY FOR ITS PROP-DRIVEN
TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT, SUCH AS C-199'S, WILL BE
AFFECTED IF RAIL LINE IS NOT SOON REPAIRED
OR ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION ARRANGED (SEE
PARA 3). EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT EAL HAS APPROX
20 DAYS' SUPPLY OF AVGAS FOR DC-3'S. NO ESTIMATES
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ARE AVAILABLE FOR AVGAS HOLDINGS BY
ETHIOPIAN AIR FORCE. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT
TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT HAVE NOT BEEN HEAVILY USED BY
ETHIOPIAN AIR FORCE EXCEPT IN ASMARA WHICH IS, OF
COURSE, NOT AFFECTED BY DISRUPTION IN ADDIS -DJIBOUTI
RAILROAD. NEVERTHELESS, THESE AIRCRAFT COULD BECOME
IMPORTANT IN SUPPLYING DIRE DAWA/HARAR ARE IF

RAILROAD CONTINUES TO BE DISRUPTED AND ASSUMING
ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF SUPPLYING AVGAS TO AIR
FORCE IN ADDIS ARE ARRANGED.

3. OFFICIALS OF OIL COMPANIES MET WITH MINISTERS OF
COMMERCE AND HEAD OF ETHIOPIAN REFINERY COMPANY JUNE 3
TO MAKE PLANS FOR PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF
SUPPLY FOR JET-A AND AVGAS. ACCORDING TO OIL
COMPANY SOURCES, PRELIMINARY THINKING INVOLVES IM-
PORTATION OF THESE TWO PRODUCTS TO ASSAB AND THEN
TRANSPORTING BY TANK TRUCKS TO ADDIS. TANK STORAGE
IS AVAILABLE IN ASSAB ALTHOUGH IT WILL PUT A STRAIN
ON STORAGE CAPACITY. REAL PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IS
AVAILABILITY OF TANK TRUCKS. MINISTER OF COMMERCE
INDICATED DURING MEETING THAT SERVICE TO PROVINCES
NORTH OF ADDIS ABABA (AS FAR AS GONDAR AND MAKELE)
WILL BE CURTAILED IN ORDER TO RELEASE TRUCKS SERVICING
THOSE AREAS FOR USE ON RUN TO ASSAB. SINCE MOST SER-
VICE STATIONS IN THE PROVINCES NOW ALMOST FULL, THIS
IS A WORKABLE TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENT. HOWEVER, GIVEN
SHORTAGE OF TANK WAGONS, IT IS NOT A LONG-TERM SOLUTION
TO THE PROBLEM.

4. COMMENT: SUCCESSFUL ATTACK ON AT LEAST THREE BRIDGES
OF ADDIS ABABA-DJIBOUTI RAILROAD REGARDED BY MOST OB-
SERVERS HERE AS THE MOST SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT THUS FAR
AFFECTING LINES OF COMMUNICATION TO RED SEA. REPAIR
OF THE RAILROAD COULD WELL TURN OUT TO BE MUCH MORE
DIFFICULT AND LENGTHY THAN ROAD REPAIR. MOREOVER,
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THERE IS NOT EASY WAY TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE SECURITY
FOR RAILROAD LINE WHICH IS HEAVILY BRIDGED AND
TRAVELS THROUGH VERY REMOTE AREAS. OWING TO ETHIOPIA'S
INADEQUATE TRUCK FLEET, EVEN UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES,
IT IS CLEARLY NOT POSSIBLE TO SHIFT CARGO FROM THE
RAILROAD TO TRUCKS EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NOW A ROAD
OPEN BETWEEN ADDIS AND DJIBOUTI. THIS APPLIES NOT
ONLY TO PETROLEUM PRODUCTS BUT ALSO TO DRY CARGO.
CONSEQUENTLY, SHOULD THE RAILROAD BE KEPT OUT OF COM-
MISSION FOR VERY LONG, SEVERE ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS
APPEAR INEVITABLE AND THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY COULD
ALSO BE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED.
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